

VIII. I Claim:

1. A method for using a digital electrical computer apparatus located at an order center for shipping a product from a remotely located distribution center, the method including the steps of:

producing output electrical signals representing a packing list for an order of a product by causing an order center apparatus located at an order center to change input digital electrical signals into the output digital electrical signals, the order center apparatus including a digital electrical computer having a processor, the processor electrically connected to a memory device for storing and retrieving machine-readable signals in the memory device, to an input device for receiving input data and converting the input data into the input electrical signals, and to an output device for receiving the output electrical signals, and wherein the processor is controlled by a computer program to implement the step of producing;

assigning shipping information signals to the order with a digital electrical computer shipping apparatus;

linking, by digital communication, the signals representing the packing list with the shipping information signals;

transmitting the signals representing the packing list to, and receiving the signals representing the packing list at, a printer device at a distribution center located remotely from the order center;

printing the packing list at the printer device at the distribution center; and

shipping the product specified by the packing list, in accordance with the shipping information signals, from the distribution center.

2. The method of claim 1, further including the step of:

entering more of the input data at the input device to produce more of the output electrical signals including signals representing a customized element received from an ordering system; and wherein

the step of linking includes linking, by digital communication, the signals representing the packing list with the signals representing the customized element;

the step of transmitting includes transmitting the signals representing the customized element, along with the shipping information signals, to the printer device at the distribution center;

the step of printing includes printing the customized element, along with the packing list and a shipping label, at the printing device at the distribution center; and

~~the step of shipping is carried out by shipping the customized element, along~~

with the product, from the distribution center.

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3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of generating output electrical signals representing the packing list for the order of a product is carried out by using flowers as the product, such that the step of printing the packing list is carried out by ~~printing the packing list identifying the flowers.~~

4. The method of claim 3, further comprising the step of growing the flowers at the distribution center.

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5. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of printing includes printing on a sheet in the printer device; and further including the step of:
locating demarcations on the sheet in the printer device to detach the packing list from a shipping label.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the step of printing is carried out with the demarcations including perforations, such that the step of detaching includes tearing the sheet at the perforations.

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7. The method of claim 3, further including the steps of:
entering more of the input data at the input device to produce more of the output electrical signals representing a customized message received from an ordering system for communication to a recipient of the flowers;
the step of linking includes linking, by digital communication, the signals representing packing list with the signals representing the customized element;
the step of transmitting includes transmitting the signals representing the customized element, along with the shipping information signals, to the printer device at the distribution center;
the step of printing includes printing the customized element, along with the packing list and a shipping label, at the printing device at the distribution center; and
the step of shipping is carried out by shipping the customized element, along with the product, from the distribution center.

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8. The method of claim 7, wherein the step of printing includes printing ~~the customized element on a greeting card having preprinted artwork.~~

5 9. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of printing includes printing on a sheet in the printer device; and further including the step of locating a sheet in the printer, the sheet including a greeting card having preprinted artwork and demarcations for detaching the greeting card from the packing list and the shipping label; and wherein the step of shipping includes separating the packaging list, the shipping information, and the greeting card by tearing the sheet at the demarcations.

10 10. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of assigning the shipping information signals includes dynamically assigning the shipping information signals through a TCP/IP connection.

15 11. The method of claim 3, further including the step of:
prior to the step of transmitting, translating at the order center apparatus to produce the signals representing the packing list and the shipping list signals in one digital format.

20 12. The method of claim 3, wherein the steps of transmitting and printing are carried out with the printing device being a fax machine; and further including the step of connecting the fax machine to a communications system for the receiving of the signals representing the packing list and the shipping information signals.

25 13. The method of claim 12, wherein the step of transmitting includes transmitting via an open end network gateway to a remote fax server for a subsequent transmitting over the communications system to the fax machine.

30 14. The method of claim 12, wherein the step of transmitting includes transmitting to a remote fax server with a fax modem in a local calling area of the distribution center for a subsequent transmitting to over the communications system to the fax machine.

35 15. The method of claim 3, further including the steps of:
associating an order code signals with each said order at the order center apparatus;
obtaining shipping status information signals from the digital electrical computer shipping system; and

~~combining the order code signals with the status information signals at a~~

machine-readable site having a network gateway address for access by an ordering system including a digital electrical computer.

5 16. The method of claim 3, further including the step of
printing an network gateway address on packaging for the product to
facilitate an electronic communication from an ordering system digital electrical computer to
the order center apparatus.

10 17. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of producing includes:
making the processor electrically connected to the input device by
electrically connecting the input device to an ordering system computer, and electrically
connecting the ordering system computer to an network gateway, and electrically
connecting the network gateway to the processor.

15 18. The method of claim 3, further including the step of
providing telephones at the order center for receiving acoustic ordering
information for use as the input data.

20 19. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of
producing the product at the distribution center.

25 20. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of printing includes printing
on a sheet in the printer device; and further including the step of
locating demarcations on a sheet in the printer device to detach the packing
list and a shipping label.

30 21. The method of claim 20, wherein the step of printing is carried out
with the demarcations including perforations to detach the packing list from the shipping
label.

35 22. The method of claim 1, further including the steps of:
entering more of the input data at the input device to produce more of the
output electrical signals representing a customized message received from an ordering
system for communication to a recipient of the product;
the step of linking includes linking, by digital communication, the signals
representing packing list with the signals representing the customized element;

the step of transmitting includes transmitting the signals representing the customized element, along with the shipping information signals, to the printer device at the distribution center;

the step of printing includes printing the customized element, along with the packing list and a shipping label, at the printing device at the distribution center; and

the step of shipping is carried out by shipping the customized element, along with the product, from the distribution center.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the step of printing includes printing the message on a greeting card.

24. The method of claim 22, wherein the step of printing is carried out by locating a sheet in the printer, the sheet including a greeting card for the message and having preprinted artwork and demarcations for detaching the greeting card from the packing list and the shipping label; and wherein the step of shipping includes separating the packaging list, the shipping information, and the greeting card by tearing the sheet at the demarcations.

25. The method of claim 22, wherein the step of printing includes printing a graphical element as part of the customized message.

26. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of assigning the shipping information signals includes dynamically assigning the shipping information signals through a TCP/IP connection.

27. The method of claim 1, further including the step of:
prior to the step of transmitting, translating at the order center apparatus to produce the signals representing the packing list and the shipping list signals in one digital format.

28. The method of claim 1, wherein the steps of transmitting and printing are carried out with the printing device being a fax machine; and further including the step of connecting the fax machine to a communications system for the receiving of the signals representing the packing list and the shipping information signals.

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30. ~~The method of claim 28, wherein the step of transmitting includes~~

transmitting via a network gateway to a remote fax server for a subsequent transmitting over the communications system to the fax machine.

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31. The method of claim 28, wherein the step of transmitting includes transmitting to a remote fax server with a fax modem in a local calling area of the distribution center for a subsequent transmitting to over the communications system to the fax machine.

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32. The method of claim 1, further including the steps of:
associating an order code signals with each said order at the order center apparatus;
obtaining shipping status information signals from the digital electrical computer shipping system; and
combining the order code signals with the status information signals at a machine-readable site having a gateway address for access by an ordering system digital electrical computer.

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33. The method of claim 1, further including the step of
printing a network gateway address on packaging for the product to facilitate an electronic communication from an ordering system digital electrical computer to the order center apparatus.

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34. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of producing includes:
making the processor electrically connected to the input device by electrically connecting the input device to an ordering system digital electrical computer and electrically connecting the ordering system digital electrical computer to a network gateway, and electrically connecting the network gateway to the processor.

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35. The method of claim 1, further including the step of
providing telephones at the order center for receiving acoustic ordering information for use as the input data.

35. The method of claim 1, further including the steps of:
verifying charge card availability to pay for the product by an electrical communication from the order center apparatus to a charge card digital electrical computer system prior to shipping the product; and

processing the shipping information to trigger a second electronic communication to the charge card digital electrical computer system charging the payment to the charge card subsequent to the shipping the product.

5 36. The method of claim 35, wherein the step of communicating data representing the shipping information to the digital electrical computer apparatus at the order center includes:

 scanning a shipping label to obtain scanning data;

10 transmitting the scanning data to the digital electrical computer apparatus at the order center for processing the shipping information to trigger the charging of the charge card.

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15 37. A combination including a shipped product produced by the process of any one of the claims 1 through 36.

20 38. A combination of machines and a product article of manufacture for use in the method of claim 1, the apparatus including:

 an order center apparatus located at an order center, the order center apparatus including a digital electrical computer having a processor, the processor electrically connected to a memory device for storing and retrieving operations including machine-readable signals in the memory device, to an input device for receiving input data and converting the input data into input electrical signals, to an output device for converting output electrical signals into output, the processor controlled by a computer program to the produce circuitry connections in the processor in producing the output electrical signals from the input electrical signals, including generating output signals representing a packing list for an order of a product from the input data entered at the input device;

25 a digital electrical computer shipping system to assign shipping information to the order;

30 a communications system for transmitting the electrical signals representing the packing list and the shipping information signals;

 a printer device at a distribution center located remotely from the order center and from the shipping system for receiving the signals representing the packing list and for printing a packing list from the signals representing the packing list; and

35 packaging for the product for shipment from the distribution center according to the shipping information signals.

39. A method for making an apparatus for the method of claim 1, the method including the steps of:

5 providing an order center apparatus located at an order center, the order center apparatus including a digital electrical computer having a processor, the processor electrically connected to a memory device for storing and retrieving operations including machine-readable signals in the memory device, to an input device for receiving input data and converting the input data into input electrical signals, to an output device for converting output electrical signals into output, the processor controlled by a computer program to the produce circuitry connections in the processor in producing the output electrical signals from the input electrical signals, including generating output signals representing a packing list for an order of a product from the input data entered at the input device;

10 providing a digital electrical computer shipping system controlled by a program to assign shipping information to the order;

15 linking the order center apparatus and the shipping system to a communications system for transmitting the electrical signals representing the packing list and the shipping information signals;

20 linking a printer device to the communications system at a distribution center located remotely from the ordering center and from the shipping system for receiving the signals representing the packing list and the shipping information signals, and for printing a packing list from the signals representing the packing list; and

shipping the product specified by the packing list, according to the shipping information signals, and from the distribution center.

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